

THIRD TIME LUCKY FOR WANDERERS?

ONLY two days after facing Slough in the F.A. Trophy, Wycombe Wanderers stage the second replay of the F.A. Cup first round, when they take on Bedford at Loakes Park. The Blues must be praying it will be a case of third time lucky (writes Stuart Earp).

It is not easy to look at the prospects of this match for both sides have games tomorrow (Saturday). While Wanderers are at Slough, Bedford travel to Grantham for a Southern League Premier Division game. Of the two, Wycombe's is obviously the more important as neither Bedford nor Grantham have any pretensions for honours in the league.

Should either side sustain injuries, it could mean the difference between victory and defeat for they have shown in the two previous

meetings that they are ideally matched. An injured player would tip the delicately balanced scales.

Wanderers must be doubtful of John Delaney who cut his eyebrow at Bedford on Monday. But Delaney's contribution in the two games has been enormous and I feel he himself will be the last one to stand down through injury. It was John who pulled his side right back into the game by scoring early in the second half at Bedford while his defensive performance was excellent.

Looking back on the two matches, Wycombe should be already making arrangements for the trip to Cardiff City on December 13. There's not much doubt the Blues should have sewn this tie up at the first attempt last Saturday at Loakes Park. They had three clear chances to Bedford's one.

The replay was different. Bedford had a greater number of opportunities on their own ground but they must have been shocked by the way Wanderers came

back from a two-goal deficit. It took real character and heart to haul themselves back and they deserve every praise for their achievement.

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The two goals they scored were both results of shoddy defensive work by the home back four. Each time they were slow to clear dangerous situations inside their penalty area and they paid the full price. That could be the difference between the two sides on Monday.

Bedford seem to rely a good deal on the long-ball upfield for their two speed merchants to chase and Peter Phillips got through all too regularly in the replay. He will need careful attention once again for his speed is there for all to see. There must be no slip up in the marking of Gary Sargent also. He has hardly been given a sniff by Mead and Delaney but is clearly a dangerous player.

Little Peter Hawkins has also impressed me. He is nippy on the flanks and sends over some dangerous crosses when given the chance. In midfield, Leo Markham has looked Bedford's

best player, defending well and showing a willingness to shoot from long range. But, above all, it has been Bedford's defence that has served them well despite those two lapses in the 2-2 draw.

Norman Cooley and Trevor Gould, two experienced centre backs, have shown they are hard to beat, especially in the air. If Dylan Evans could make a greater impression on them, chances might come more regularly for Wanderers.

Bedford boss Jim Walker was full of praise for Wycombe's revival on Monday. He singled out Tony Horseman and John Maskell for particular mention saying the goalkeeper was worth his weight in gold. Certainly, John has played a vital role in keeping the sides level over the two games and his save from Hawkins in the first match was bordering on the incredible.

It seems a pity that one of these two clubs has to make an exit from this year's F.A. Cup, for they are so evenly matched. Incredibly, it has all happened before and the current pattern of replays looks like repeating itself again.

In the 1966 season the two clubs met at the same stage of the same competition. The first

game at Loakes Park ended in a 1-1 draw and the replay at Bedford finished at 3-3. The second replay also ended in stalemate 1-1 and eventually, at the fourth attempt, Bedford got through at last with a 3-2 victory. The games attracted over 30,000 fans and Monday's game is sure to bring in a bumper crowd.

I expect something in excess of 5,000 for the game and it could well swell to over 6,000.

As to the outcome, it would take a brave man to make any prediction after two drawn games. One can only take the two matches and compare them. As Wycombe were the superior side at Loakes Park, although only marginally, they must have a slight advantage.

The referee will be Clive White, who handled the first replay so well at Bedford. A Football League official, Mr. White has the respect of both sets of players and showed his appreciation of the game at Bedford when he applauded both sides from the field at the end.

Should a further replay be necessary, it must be played by Thursday.